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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
Radio Service
OFFICE OF INFORMATION

HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Monday, September 9, 1935

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "MARKETING FOR VEGETABLES." Information from the Bureau of Agricultural Economics, the Bureau of Plant Industry, and the Bureau of Home Economics, United States Department of Agriculture.

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Marketing tips for the home vegetable buyer is the subject of our conversation today. If you're interested in getting your money's worth in the fresh vegetables you buy this fall, here's help from the vegetable men in the Department of Agriculture.

First, to answer a few questions about eggplant. I'm beginning with eggplant because I personally consider it one of our most beautiful vegetables. It's glossy royal-purple color always appeals to me, also its handsome shape. I've sometimes wondered if American housewives generally have considered it too good-looking to eat. Though it's more and more commonly on the market these days, it still doesn't get to the family dinner table as often as it deserves.

The eggplant is one of our steadier standbys in the market, coming the whole year 'round in pretty good quantity. It's likely to be cheaper in late summer as its peak of supply is in August. But it is still going strong in October. From then on it drops to a low supply all winter and picks up again in March.

In choosing an eggplant, consider its weight first. Heaviness is one good sign of quality. Then, be sure its flesh is firm and solid. Avoid eggplant that is wilted or shriveled or soft or flabby. This may mean it's not ripe enough, or too ripe, or has grown under poor conditions so its taste may be bitter. Be sure its color is dark and even. Be sure it has no blemishes. Dark brown spots usually mean waste. Well, there you have the chief points to remember when you pick out eggplant at the market: Heaviness; firm solid flesh; dark, even color, no blemishes which cause waste.

Probably the most common way to cook eggplant is to slice it and dip the slices in batter, and fry them. I'm glad to say that most up-and-coming cooks today don't make the old mistake of salting and pressing the slices with a plate to draw out the juice. This only makes the slice limp and flabby. Drawing out the juice doesn't draw out bitterness, you know. A bitter eggplant is bitter all the way through and removing a little juice doesn't help. What makes eggplant bitter? Well, the plant men answer: "Something that happens to it during its growth -- maybe drought or wrong soil or something similar." Generally, though, you'll have little trouble of this sort if you choose your eggplant carefully.

By the way, besides the familiar method of frying eggplant slices, you might like to try scalloping it with chopped onion and green pepper, tomatoes and bread crumbs. Or, try broiling slices under a flame about 10 minutes, and serving with butter. You can also bake this vegetable in halves with thin slices of bacon over the top, or scoop out halves and stuff them with their own pulp, seasoning and breadcrumbs.

Speaking of stuffing vegetables, naturally bring peppers to my mind. When you go marketing, you'll generally find two kinds of peppers for sale. Both kinds are deep green in color at one stage of their life, and red when ripe. The two kinds of peppers are: the sweet, and the hot or pungent type, to which chili or cayenne peppers belong.

Sweet peppers are usually bell-shape, or "bull-nose" shape, as some less poetic people describe them, and they usually are shipped when mature but still green in color. They change from deep green to bronze-red or bright-red as they continue to mature. You can buy them either at the green or red stage. If you want sweet peppers for stuffing, you'll choose those with a short, chunky shape. The long and slender varieties are good for salads or garnishing.

The hot or pungent peppers vary all the way from the small chili to the large hot pepper that has something of a bell shape. As a rule, these hot varieties haven't as thick flesh as the sweet kind, and most people use them at the red stage. If you've traveled through the Southwest, you know how the Mexicans thread chili peppers on strings to dry and use for their winter chili con carne.

Well, what's a good buy in a fresh pepper? The vegetable men say: "One that is mature, firm, thick-fleshed, of good shape, clear color, and fresh appearance."

They say that immature peppers are usually soft, flabby, thin-fleshed and pale in color. The seeds in a mature pepper are hard.

Avoid shriveled or soft peppers. That means that they are either too old or too young or have been kept too long.

Now a few words about buying lima beans. Today you can usually buy fresh lima beans either shelled or unshelled. Of course, shelled beans deteriorate much faster than those left in the pod. So usually the grocer tries to shell them just before selling them. Here's a keeping point to remember: shelled beans, unless kept in the refrigerator, get moldy or slimy. Before you buy beans this way, puncture the skin to see if they are tender. If they have hard tough skins, they're too old and won't have the best flavor. A good buy is plump beans with a good green or greenish white color.

Now about buying beans in the pod. Look for well-filled pods that are of a dark-green color and are clean and bright and fresh-looking. Avoid dried up, shriveled, spotted, yellow, or flabby pods. That means that they're too old or in poor condition and the beans inside won't have such a good flavor. Also avoid beans with moldy spots; they mean waste.

So much for buying egg-plant, peppers and lima beans. Some day soon we'll talk about buying other fall vegetables.

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